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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003704

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2014

TAGS: PHUM KJUS KIRF VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN POLICE RAID HEBREW CULTURAL CENTER

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d)
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Summary

¶1. (U) Venezuelan police investigating the killing of prosecutor Danilo Anderson searched the Hebrew Club in Caracas November 29 for three hours. The search, which began at 6:30 a.m. and disrupted the arrival of 1,500 students to the school on the premises, turned up no evidence or weapons. Leaders of the Jewish community in Venezuela expressed outrage at the timing of the search, and questioned whether further actions could be expected. GOV officials said they searched the Caracas Jewish community's principal cultural facility because they had reports of weapons on the grounds. Newspaper reports suggested that rumors of Israeli involvement in the Anderson assassination might be behind the search. End Summary

Unsuccessful Search

¶2. (U) Members of Venezuela's Investigative Police (CICPC) carried out a search order issued by Control Judge Maikel Moreno for the installations of the Hebrew Club in Caracas November 29. The Hebrew Club contains a school, cultural center, and sports facilities. Judge Moreno is responsible for the investigation of the car bomb assassination of Danilo Anderson, Venezuela's most visible and controversial prosecutor, on November 18. The officers arrived at 6:30 am and left at 9:30 am. According to a statement released by the Confederation of Israeli Associations of Venezuela (CAIV), the official report the officers filled out after the search stated that no evidence or weapons were found. Minister of Interior and Justice Jesse Chacon told reporters he did not know the exact reason for the search, but that it could be related to reports of weapons being hidden at various installations around Caracas. Police have searched various businesses and homes linked to the case.

Reactions

¶3. (C) David Slimak, President of the CAIV, told PolOff November 30 that the search had been conducted at the worst possible time, just as 1,500 students were arriving at the school housed within the Club. He said he did not know if this was a mistake, or intentional. Slimak said members of the Jewish community were extremely upset to find the school closed and a police operation underway as they brought their children to school. He said the parents feared there was a bomb threat or an attack had taken place. He claimed that it was more upsetting to him that the search implied that the Jewish community was somehow implicated in the Anderson attack, than if there had been a bomb threat. Slimak observed that the officers were polite, and behaved professionally throughout the search.

¶4. (U) The head Rabbi of the Jewish community in Venezuela, Pinchas Brener, released a press statement in which he expressed his "consternation" and "horror" at the search, pointing out that it was unheard of throughout the world to search a school. He asked how anyone could think that the Jewish community was involved in the assassination of Anderson, and defended the political nature of the Jewish community, though individuals might be politically active. He ended the statement by saying, "We hope that this is not the beginning of a greater action; if this is today, we do not know what tomorrow will bring."

Israeli Angle?

¶5. (U) The daily newspaper El Nacional November 30 suggested that the raid traced back to the comments of Venezuelan satirist Orlando Urdaneta in an interview on Miami television on November 23. According to the newspaper he

suggested that an Israeli commando would be the best way to kill President Chavez. (Note: In fact, Urdaneta's comments were more elliptical, and in response to a question about dictators such as Fidel Castro.) Tupamaro leader Jose Pinto

then reportedly warned that Mossad agents were active in the group that killed Anderson. On November 24 the Israeli Embassy in Caracas released a statement categorically denying any Israeli role in the assassination, and warning that such statements could confuse people.

Comment

16. (C) Venezuelan police have conducted various raids since the death of Anderson. We do not know if there was any genuine investigative reason for this or other searches. There may be some fear among Chavistas of Israeli involvement in Anderson's murder, which led them "logically" to the Hebrew Club. Rumors quickly circulated, for example, linking the incident to President Hugo Chavez's visit to Iran, and the "possibility" that the Iranians warned the President of Mossad's alleged capabilities and links to the U.S. The timing of the raid could also be a product of police incompetence and indifference to public convenience. Post will continue to monitor the situation, alert to any indications of anti-Semitism.

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